



CONSUMER NEWS

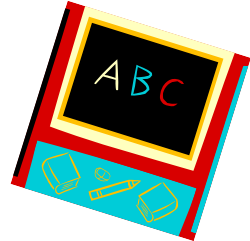
Office of Consumer Affairs

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Back to School Saving and Shopping Tips

It may still be summer, but the back-to-school season has arrived. In August parents and students begin to prepare for the new school year by purchasing everything from pencils to new shoes. "Back-to-school shopping is almost as big as the holiday season for retailers," said Cynthia Sich, Director of the Summit County Office of Consumer Affairs. "This is a great opportunity for the office to provide tips for families."



Saving Tips

Create a budget. Take inventory of what you already have and determine what is needed for the upcoming school year. List the items in the order of priority and the estimated cost. Do not forget miscellaneous expenses like extra-curricular activities and uniforms, field trips and lab fees. Decide how much money you can spend and what can be removed from the list if necessary. And always recycle and reuse last year's gear before purchasing new!

Involve children. Back-to-school shopping offers an opportunity for parents to teach children about budgeting and wants vs. needs. Allow the kids to help make decisions about selecting items and remind them that if they choose a less expensive item in one area, they will have more to spend in others.

Consider using layaway. Many stores are once again offering the option of layaway plans. This is a great way to make cash payments on merchandise and avoid the use of credit cards. For more information about layaway plans, read: http://www.co.summit.oh.us/ConsumerAffairs/pdfs/CA_Factsheet_LayawayPlans.pdf.

Shop second hand stores. Because children grow so quickly, thrift or consignment shops may have a variety of barely worn clothing at a fraction of the original cost.

Save on textbooks. Purchase used textbooks from other students, online or bookstores. Find out if there is a big difference in new editions and a previous edition which may be cheaper.

Shopping Tips

Know about refunds and exchanges. Because stores can choose their own refund policy, it is always smart to ask about the refund and return policy before you purchase your back-to-school gear. And, be sure to keep your receipts.

Check to see if school supply lists are available. Many times local schools will release their list of supplies to stores in that area in advance. The stores will post the supply list in the back-to-school section. If there are not lists at your local shopping center, call the school or school district.

Compare prices. The back-to-school section at your favorite retail store may offer convenience, but be sure to check outlets, dollar stores and office supply stores to get a good deal. Carry store circulars with you for comparison and to see if retailers will match prices.

Know your dormitory room. When purchasing dorm room furniture, make sure you know your limitations when it comes to room space. If possible, visit the dorm so that you will know what you need to purchase and the size. Consider furniture that doubles as storage space.

Be careful shopping online. Do your research and shop around. Be careful of prices that are drastically lower than those you have seen elsewhere – the lowest price is not always the best deal and may indicate a scam. Pay by credit card so that you have more protection if there is a problem. Under federal law, consumers have the right to dispute charges within 60 days of receiving a bill.